

Tetanus (lockjaw) by Mervin Morse (modified)

All who work in wet, dirty conditions have a possibility of developing tetanus. Infections such as tetanus can result from even small mishaps.

Tetanus or lockjaw is caused by the bacterium, *Clostridium tetani*. The bacteria can live anywhere, but are usually found in soil, dust, and manure. They can get in through even a tiny pinprick or scratch, but prefer deep puncture wounds or cuts. Once the bacteria get into the body they can produce a toxin, and it may take from 3 days to 3 weeks for the first symptoms to appear. As the toxin spreads, it causes muscle spasms in the neck, jaws, arms, legs, and stomach. It can cause painful muscle contractions strong enough to break a child's bones. There are only about 50 cases of tetanus a year in the U.S., but 3 out of 10 people who contract tetanus die from it. Tetanus vaccines are available, and most of us have been immunized as a child. Some people think that they don't need another vaccination, but medical experts recommend a booster shot about every ten years. So if it has been a long time since you've had your Tetanus vaccine, call your doctor and get that booster shot.